

LYSISTRATA, WOMAN'S VOICE TO PEACEKEEPING AND PEACEBUILDING

M. Mercè Domínguez

ABSTRACT: According to Jung's theory, archetypes are always present, directing our lives from the unconscious. Lysistrata is an archetype of the feminine, which is present in both men and women, playing a decisive role in peacebuilding around the world. Following Lysistrata's history, a review antiwar comedy written by Aristophanes in the V century BC, the rich meaning of this archetype can be decoded to understand its current message. Thus, overcoming conflicts and building some bridges to promote communication and peace, Lysistrata is now working for us.

KEY WORDS: Lysistrata, archetype, war, peace and peacebuilding.

RESUMEN: Segons la teoria de Jung, els arquetips sempre són presents dirigint la nostra vida des de l'inconscient. Lisístrata és un arquetip del femení, present tant en l'home com en la dona, que té un rol decisiu en la construcció de la pau al món. Seguint la història de Lisístrata, una comèdia contra la guerra escrita per Aristòfanes al segle V aC, el ric significat d'aquest arquetip pot ser descodificat per tal d'entendre el seu missatge actual. Així, superant els conflictes i construint ponts per tal de promoure la comunicació i la pau, Lisístrata està ara treballant per nosaltres.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Lisístrata, arquetip, guerra, pau i construcció de la pau.

In this troubled world, where we live, it is a fact that the healing power of women and their potential energy to solve conflicts have not been completely exploited in international affairs such as peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Obviously we can refer only to many centuries of cultural obscurantism, during which women have been regarded as a vile demonic creature, carrying not only sin but also war –Helen of Troy as guilty of the Trojan War is an example–. This image is still in our collective unconscious and even though it is being transformed gradually, little by little, women's voices have been silenced for a long time -like the voice of Cassandra, who wanted to warn the Trojans against the Achaeans' attack without success.

However, Aristophanes, who wrote in the V century BC some anti-war comedies, chose curiously a woman as the main character for one of his most famous plays: *Lysistrata*.

Lysistrata is a woman with a strong personality, who, tired of the endless war between Athenians and Spartans, calls women on both sides and proposes an unusual solution: sex strike for warriors. She appeals to women's union to save the country:

«But if the women join us from Peloponnesus and Boeotia, then hand in hand we'll rescue Greece».¹

In this play Aristophanes not only shows us the senselessness of war, but also the oppression of women during wars. For the first time, women are presented as victims, who, paradoxically, can break free not only themselves but also their husbands, lovers and children peacefully.

Undoubtedly, always women have been sexual victims in armed conflicts, although their suffering has been forgotten and underestimated for centuries, even though, normally, they have been part of the spoil of war. Moreover there are the kidnapping and rape of women and girls for sexual enjoyment of the soldiers and their subsequent prostitution. Women, who are mothers, daughters, wives or girlfriends, who mourn and bury their deceased... How could such victims change their role? How could their voices resound in a masculine world?

It is really amazing that this performance was played in Athens in 411 BC,² precisely in such patriarchal society as Greece. Symbolically *Lysistrata* represents long silenced human voice emerging from depths of nature and crying out against war and for peace.

In fact, *Lysistrata* is an archetype of the Feminine, which falls to women and men indiscriminately. According to Jung's theory, an archetype is an unconscious collective structure that can be filled with some emotional real experiences shaping, at the same time, how people interpret and feel the world, others and themselves, thus not only conditioning how people are being in the world, but also their interactions and understandings of their external and internal reality. As archetype, it-self has no gender condition, then it is not female or male, although it can be linked to one or other gender –masculine or feminine in its external manifestation. However, through its ancestral

¹ ARISTOPHANES (1999): *Lysistrata*, English translation: <http://www-perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%31999.01.0242>, v. 39-41.

² LESKY, A. (1989) *Historia de la Literatura Griega*, Madrid, Gredos, p. 469.

running, it can be encoded with a specific gender in the collective unconscious shared by a certain community.³

Obviously, in human collective background, there is still the traditional conception which represents women as the bearers of life. This idea is fixed unconsciously and consequently women are also socially the bearers of Lysistrata archetype:

«O tender Eros and Lady of Cyprus, some flush of beauty I pray you devise to flash on our bosoms and, o Aphrodite, rosily gleam on our valorous thighs! Joy will raise up its head through the legions warring and all of the far-serried ranks of mad-love bristle the earth to the pillared horizon, pointing in vain to the heavens above. I think that perhaps then they'll give us our title –Peace-makers».⁴

Despite the importance of this archetype, traditional education has transmitted only negative feminine attributes about wars, rejecting its positive side, consequently during a lot of years this women's peace-making has been mistranslated into society, where feminine caution against aggressiveness meant cowardice, weakness or insecurity and instead warriors represented masculine heroism including strong decisive power, intelligence and bravery as it is shown in the main characters of some very known westerns like 7th. *Regiment of Cavalry* (Raoul Walsh, 1941), *Fort Apache* (John Ford, 1948) or *The Magnificent Seven* (John Sturges, 1960).

Certainly Lysistrata is a comedy and people are expected to laugh until one cries about women's absurdities. How a woman could replay a Magistrate, who embodied Law rejecting his reasons and giving feminine advice? How a woman could criticize openly the war business? However according to Theory of the Unconscious people laugh about real subjects expressed in key of comedy, when nobody dares to speak about them, because the social rules are coercive, then only through mocking events or mocking stories people get to reduce stress, precisely this same stress, which has been generated by previous prohibitions.⁵

In fact, with laughter and parodies, war business is denounced by Aristophanes in the Lysistrata's reproach:

«MAGISTRATE: Is gold then the cause of the war?

LYSISTRATA: Yes, gold caused it and miseries more, too many to be told. It was for money, and money alone, that Pisander with all of the army of mob-agitators. Raised up revolutions. But, as for the future, it won't be worth, while to set up to be traitors. Not an obol they'll get as their loot, not an obol! While we have the treasure-chest in our command».⁶

³ JUNG, C. G. (1995) *Zwei Schriften über Psychologie*, Complete Works, Volume 7, Walter-Verlag, Jung in the chapter 5: *Das persönliche und das überpersonliche oder collective Unbewusste*, wrote a good description about archetypes working in connection with collective unconscious. There is an English version (1999) London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd.

⁴ ARISTOPHANES: *Lysistrata*, op. cit. v. 551-554.

⁵ According with the Freud's defended thesis about jokes in FREUD, SIGMUND (1960) *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, London/New York, W.W. Northon and Company

⁶ ARISTOPHANES: *Lysistrata*, op. cit., v. 489-492.

Moreover, Aristophanes, as a good writer, let speak some collective repressed voices, because there is not only his creature expressing his thoughts, but also at the same time, Lysistrata's voice representing so repressed women's voice, consequently Aristophanes shows us a feminine message saying that war is an enormous waste of money, energy, lives and opportunities of being. War has been established therefore in the nonsense and human irrationality:

«But when at the last in the streets we heard shouted (everywhere ringing the ominous cry) "Is there no one to help us, no saviour in Athens?" and, "no, there is no one," come back in reply. At once a convention of all wives through Hellas here for a serious purpose was held, to determine how husbands might yet back to wisdom despite their reluctance in time be compelled. Why then delay any longer? It's settled. For the future you'll take up our old occupation. Now in turn you're to hold tongue, as we did, and listen while we show the way to recover the nation».⁷

And what is the advice to finish war? Lysistrata considered something as easy as undoing knots in balls of wool:

«Well, first as we wash dirty wool so is to cleanse it, so with a pitiless zeal we will scrub through the whole city for all greasy fellows; burrs too, the parasites, off we will rub. That verminous plague of insensate place-seekers soon between thumb and forefinger we'll crack all who inside Athens' walls have their dwelling into one great common basket we'll pack. Disenfranchised or citizens, allies or aliens, pell-mell the lot of them in we will squeeze. Till they discover humanity's meaning.... As for disjointed and far colonies, then you must never from this time imagine as scattered about just like lost hanks of wool. Each portion we'll take and wind in to this centre, inward to Athens each loyalty pull, till from the vast heap where all's piled together at last can be woven a strong Cloak of State».⁸

The feminine archetype of Lysistrata presented this marvellous metaphor to finish war washing offenses and undoing injustices. How? Talking, debating and creating new peace possibilities, because according to Yezid Arteta, Colombian writer and peace activist: «It is better to debate ideas than to count remains».⁹

The symbolic power of the Lysistrata's archetype, whose name indicates: *The One that Can Dissolve Armies*,¹⁰ was manifested in the hippies movement by the slogan: «make love not war» and in the Beatles song: «All you need is love» against Vietnam War. However, all that emerged like a spontaneous cry of the collective unconscious embodied in a generational revolt and as unconscious process it could not be contained, because every collective and unconscious process only can be understood and assimilated a posteriori. Consequently only when people are conscious, the energy of an archetype is susceptible of being used for a good and concrete cause, thereby during the

⁷ ARISTOPHANES: *Lysistrata*, op. cit., v. 523-528.

⁸ ARISTOPHANES: *Lysistrata*, op. cit., v. 574-586

⁹ ARTETA, Y. (2013) *semana.com*. 22th. June 2013 <http://www-semana-com/nacion/articulo/es-mejor-debatir-ideas-contar-muertos/348379-3> Yezid Arteta is a Colombian writer, ex-combatant of the Colombian FARC, who nowadays takes part in the Colombian Peace Talks.

¹⁰ According to the Christian Carandell's in the prologue of *Lysistrata* Catalan translation from Greek (2010), Adesiara, Martorell, p. 29.

process of hippy movement so much energy, which found no appropriated channels to actually act in favor of peace, was lost. I consider that it was a pity, because the youth power to change the world was real, the energy was there, but discontented and consequently it was not effective. It went out quickly like a gust of wind.

However, following the historical route of this archetype in our times, we can emphasize some proposals of women's union against war and for peace. This power of Feminine has been recaptured in the Lysistrata project: «an educational resources portal dedicated to peace and the transformation of consciousness necessary to create it».¹¹

Lysa Dollar, creator of [Lysistrataproject.org](http://lysistrataproject.org) said: «Lysistrata is an archetype, an emblem for women to stand up and be».¹² This project promoted a Theatrical Act of Dissent against the Iraq's War, which was organized by New York City actresses Kathryn Blume and Sharron Bower, who invited people to join them playing the Aristophanes piece around the world, which was sometimes rewritten and adapted to the new events. This pacific battle performance involved more or less 1.000 global readings from Russia, Thailand, Cambodia, Australia...running through the most important cities of Europe and America to a refugee camp for Kurds in Patra (Greece).¹³

Probably all those pacifist events could be considered orthodoxly no peacekeeping, because according to the UN definition peacekeeping is the help for countries torn by conflict creating conditions for lasting peace,¹⁴ but there were around the world a lot of people making efforts to maintain peace expressing their disagreement against the imminent Iraq's War and I think that it was also a peacekeeping demonstration, in other words expanding the meaning of the concept, peacekeeping could include actions before the conflict explodes. The archetype action rushed through one country to another. The collective unconscious was going into action.

However, when war is a real fact, Lysistrata is also present there with her feminine power joining forces for peace, repelling threats and dissolving conflicts, consequently the question is now: what role could play actually women then?

One response to this question is the feminine movement of Women in Black, who define themselves as «a world-wide network of women committed to peace with justice and actively opposed to injustice, war, militarism and other forms of violence. As women experiencing these things in different ways in different regions of the world, we support each other's movements. An important focus is challenging the militarist policies of our own governments. We are not an organization, but a means of communicating and a formula for action».¹⁵

Women in Black have been working for many years in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. They were also present during the Balkan War and they acted too protecting other women as much in the Pakistan war as in the Afghanistan war... This world women movement defends a different way of experiencing war between women

¹¹ <http://www.lysistrataproject.org/aboutus.htm>

¹² <http://www.lysistrataproject.org/aboutus.htm>

¹³ <http://www.worldpress.org/977.cfm> About this event there is a documentary film directed by Michael Patrick Kelly in 2006: *Operation Lysistrata*.

¹⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/peacekeeping.shtml>

¹⁵ <http://womeninblack.org/en/about>

and men –the same that said Lysistrata– They explain that even though men and women are natural born peace-makers, the differences in the way of living military conflicts are important enough, because men and women inhabit different cultural spaces and carry different social responsibilities and obviously their war experience is also different.

Another example of the archetype power points to women's answer in Liberia, Togo or Philippines, where women decided to rebel like Lysistrata with her powerful and peaceful weapon: sex strike to get peace.

In Liberia in 2003, Leymah Gbowee, 2011 Nobel Peace Prices, and the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace got the end of the war, which lasted 14 years; thanks to the constant action on men, a part of the sexual reject, they followed other very effective strategies. A Liberian witness explains: «When the parties refused to sign the ceasefire agreement, the women sat in front of the door and would not let them leave. Everybody was locked in and that eventually led to the signing of the agreement».¹⁶

In Philippines in 2011 women of Mindanao went on a sex strike demanding the peace between two hostile villages.¹⁷

In Togo in 2012 women imposed also a sex strike pressure as well demanding the President's resignation.¹⁸

It is clear that the Lysistrata's archetype continues doing its work, although the problem now is another: can people be attentive to hear its wise message, which had emerged from the collective unconscious or it is necessary to wait even some centuries before understanding it? It would be desirable for everybody that War Lords could listen to it...

Meanwhile there are happening some important changes in our current society: women who have been always seen as victims and subjects without voice in many wars, finally can be helped by other women around the world –cosmopolitan peacekeeping and peacebuilding beyond women is being expanding–, then they can become subject of their own future, designing strategies for a mutual cooperation to solve conflicts, for example in Truth Commissions, where women listen war atrocities lived by other women. It is preferable and easier for a victim woman to be heard by another woman, when the culprit has been a man.

Unfortunately a lot of women have been tortured, kidnaped or raped during a conflict and few of them have been witness too. Often some of them kept silent, because they have a fear to bear social stigma of dishonor. Cultural prejudices of their environment are evident in their silence. Lysistrata complicity can appear in those cases interacting in groups of self-help, where women are sharing their war experiences according to Lysistrata's call:

¹⁶ SEVEL, E. K. (2007) «Women Building Peace: The Liberian Women's Peace Movement», *Critical Half, Bi-Annual Journal of Women for Women International*, volume 5, number 2: *Women's Narrative, War and Peace-Building*, p. 18.

¹⁷ <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/asiapcf/09/19/philippines.sex.strike/index.html>

¹⁸ <http://theguardian.com/world/2012/aug/26/togo-women-sex-strike-president>

«On, gallant allies of our high design, vendors of grain-eggs-pulse-and-vegetables, ye garlic-tavern-keepers of bakeries, strike, batter, knock, hit, slap, and scratch our foes, be finely imprudent, say what you think of them.... Enough! Retire and do not rob the dead».¹⁹

Elisabeth Porter says: «An important challenge of peacebuilding lies in responding to the legacies of human rights abuses and human suffering»,²⁰ referring to difficulties, which are living those women in some countries, where they are still regarded as inferior.

A cosmopolitan peacekeeping perspective requires undoubtedly cosmopolitan reparations. In other words, without a real recognition of the suffering of women in war increasing awareness in our global village, peacekeeping and peacebuilding are only a mirage. Empathy, compassion and solidarity are virtues of Lysistrata, who used brilliantly her intelligence acting as a team with her theoretically enemies to reconstruct peace.

I think women are having now an important role in conflictology, perhaps not totally recognized, nevertheless it seems to me that it should have more female presence, not only in the peacekeeping and peacebuilding after war, but also in prevention works before war, not only as a higher percentage of women among UN's forces, but also more women developing peace strategies or taking part in the peace conversations or in international diplomacy negotiating to avoid a possible armed confrontation and thinking the best solution to present conflicts, because «ECP estimated that 77% of the countries listed in their active armed conflict data for 2008 were also characterized by serious levels of sexual violence against women and children were reported in these conflicts»²¹ and as Jean Shinoda Bolen has written about war «regardless of who wins, we know that women and children always lose. Wise and motherly women should be involved in peace processes in sufficient numbers to change the model».²²

It seems to me that this new model is already in process, we only need to take good care of it, because Lysistrata is surely in silence working for us.

¹⁹ ARISTOPHANES: *Lysistrata*, op. cit. v. 456-461.

²⁰ PORTER, E. (2007) «Women's truth narratives: the power of compassionate listening» *Critical Half, Bi-Annually Journal of Women for Women International*, volume 5, number 2: *Women's Narrative, War and Peace-Building*, p. 22

²¹ WOODHOSEN, T. & SOLÀ MARTIN, A. (2013): *The United Nations, Armed Conflict and Peacekeeping*, UOC, Barcelona, p. 63.

²² BOLEN, J. S. (2003): *Crones don't whine*, Boston, Conari Press, p. 100.

Bibliography

- ARISTOPHANES: *Lysistrata* –English translation: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0242>
- CARANDELL, C. (2010): Prologue of *Lysistrata* in Catalan version, Martorell, Adesiara.
- FREUD, S. (1960): *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, London/New York , W. W. Northon and Company.
- JUNG, C. G. (1995): *Zwei Schriften über Analytische Psychologie*, complete works, Vol. 7, Walter Verlag.
- LESKIN, A. (1989): *Historia de la Literatura Griega*, Ed. Gredos.
- PORTER, E. (2007): *Women's truth narratives: the power of compassionate listening* in CRITICAL HALF –Bi-Annual Journal of Women for Women International, Fall 2007– Volume 5, number 2 Women's Narrative, War and Peace Building.
- SEWEL, E. K. (2007): *Women Building Peace: The Liberian Women's Peace Movement*, in CRITICAL HALF –Bi-Annual Journal of Women for Women International, Fall 2007– Volume 5, number 2 Women's Narrative, War and Peace Building.
- SHINODA BOLEN, J. (2004): *Las brujas no se quejan*, Ed. Kayros.
- WOODHOUSE, T. & SOLÀ MARTÍN, A. (2013): *The United Nations, armed conflicts and peacekeeping*, Barcelona, UOC.

Webs

- <http://www.lysistrataproject.org/aboutus.htm>
- <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/peacekeeping.shtml>
- <http://womeninblack.org/en/about>
- <http://www.worldpress.org/977.cfm>
- <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/es-mejor-debatir-ideas-contar-muertos/348379-3>
- <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/asiapcf/09/19/philippines.sex.strike/index.html>
- <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/aug/26/togo-women-sex-strike-president>